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QUESTION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF ALL PERSONS SUBJECTED TO ANY FORM OF DETENTION OR IMPRISONMENT

Written statement submitted by the International Federation of Human Rights, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[27 March 1997]

Situation of human rights in Lebanon

1. The International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH) and its partner organizations in Lebanon continue to be very concerned about the human rights situation in that country and wish to draw the attention of the Commission on Human Rights to the events of recent months.

2. In December 1996, the Lebanese intelligence services carried out mass arrests of at least 50 opposition members or presumed sympathizers, together with human rights workers, in and around Beirut and in Tripoli. The reasons given to justify these arrests (attack on a Syrian minibus, distribution of tracts "detrimental to Lebanon's relations with a friendly country" i.e. Syria, or "intelligence activities with agents of the Israeli enemy") are simply pretexts. The true reasons are political. Furthermore, many irregularities were committed in making these arrests. All of the individuals concerned were arrested without warrants and the intelligence services refused to disclose their identities and cited "oral arrest warrants". Many of the arrests were carried out at night and were accompanied by searches without warrants of the homes and offices of the persons arrested. These persons were taken to the Ministry of Defence, despite the fact that they are civilians and

that the Ministry should in principle be used for the interrogation of military personnel only. Two of the persons arrested were brought before a military court, despite their civilian status. Most of them remained in custody for several days, although by law this period is limited to 24 hours, renewable once. They were not allowed to see a lawyer or any members of their families. Finally, although no charges could be made against many of them, some were subjected to intense physical and psychological duress. Others reported being tortured, including by the "banana" method (being strung up by the arms which are tied behind the back), contrary to the legal norms and procedures required by law and by the international conventions to which Lebanon is a party, and contrary to the statements made by the public prosecutor of the Court of Cassation, Mr. A. Addoum, on the legality of the judicial proceedings.

3. This wave of arrests is further evidence of the Lebanese authorities' determination to control any form of opposition by terror (arrests which are more like kidnappings, deprivation of freedom for unlimited periods, detention incommunicado, physical and psychological duress, unlawful entry, etc.) There are fears that plans are currently being made to impose still more restrictions on fundamental rights and public freedoms and to further increase the powers of the military tribunal pursuant to the government policy of daily passing laws which reduce the freedom of Lebanese citizens to virtually nothing.

4. Human rights workers are particularly threatened in Lebanon. It is reported that, at a recent inter-Arab ministerial meeting, it was decided among other things to "get hold" of the human rights protection organizations in the countries concerned, to "settle their hash" and to urge the northern countries to end the support provided by some of them to Arab NGOs concerned with the protection of human rights: further evidence - if any were needed - of the imperative need for international protection of the freedom of action of human rights workers.

5. Under the "fraternity, cooperation and coordination" treaty concluded between Syria and Lebanon since the end of the war in 1990, the Lebanese Government permits the Syrian Army to arrest its citizens and hold many of them incommunicado in Syria. The President of the Lebanese Republic recently admitted that 210 persons had been arrested in this way, although this figure is well below the estimated thousands of Lebanese citizens who disappeared during the war, and have not been heard of since. It is likely that many of them are in Syria. FIDH is supporting a campaign for their release. Moreover, the Lebanese Government confines itself to making verbal protests, where necessary, when civilians are abducted by Israel or when the worst outrages are committed against Lebanese held in prisons under Israeli control.

6. According to information received from the Committee for the Support of Lebanese Prisoners in Israel at the beginning of this year, the administrative detention of 18 Lebanese prisoners held in Ramlah prison in Israel (some of the 50 or so kidnapped in Lebanese territory) is being extended. Eleven of them finished serving their sentences years ago, while the seven others have spent seven years in detention without ever having been sentenced. They are Bilal Dakroub, Mohamed Yassine, Ali Ammar, Kamal Rizk, Hassan Hijazi, Abdelhassan Srour, Abbas Srour, Ahmad Srour, Youssof Srour, Hossein Daqdouq, Hassan Tleis, Ahmad Taleb, Ahmad Jalloul, Hossein Ahmad, Hossein Rmeitti, Hachem Fahs and Ahmad Obeid.

7. Furthermore, of the 9 prisoners released from Khiam prison (where 150 persons are still being detained without having being tried or sentenced) in recent weeks, one, named Mohamad Mahmoud Ramadan, 31 years old and a native of Yarine, in the border strip from which he was kidnapped, was released more dead than alive. He had suffered the most appalling tortures and had been kept in solitary confinement for three years. He suffers from fainting spells, palpitations resulting from the electric shocks to his genitals and periods of depression. He also lost an eye and an arm and has a burst eardrum. He also lost his memory and had to be hospitalized on several occasions. He refused to eat or wash and tore up letters from his family. To prevent him from dying in prison, he was released and admitted to a hospital in Beirut, where he continued to refuse treatment and threatened to throw himself out of a window, as well as being unable to recognize his family.

8. Other Lebanese prisoners could suffer the same fate and the Committee which supports them is calling for an international fact-finding mission to be sent to Khiam prison to investigate Mr. Ramadan's case. The Committee is also calling for the immediate release of all prisoners who are gravely ill, such as: Lafi El-Masri, Ni'mat Bazzi, Hossein Mardi and Ali Hijazi.

9. FIDH calls for the immediate release of Lebanese prisoners from prisons under Syrian and Israeli control and for the observance of human rights by the occupying Powers. It draws the attention of the Commission on Human Rights to the breakdown of the justice system and the excesses of the authorities which continually infringe fundamental freedoms in Lebanon.